

Old Man's Darling

BY FANNY HEASLIP LEA.

Dan Cupid Mixes Up His Arrows Once More.

AT twenty-two Lynn Danby announced to her mother over a hearty breakfast that she had decided to marry Richard Welles.

"And it's no good your objecting, mother," she finished, "because he is just the sort of man I always meant to marry."

"More coffee, dear," Linnet Danby spoke calmly. "It's still hot. Now why shouldn't you think of objecting, Lynn? I hope I know my place too well."

"Now, mother! No sarcasm. You know where it gets you with me."

"I am her mother," said Linnet, "and I have been able to stand between her and anything at all. She is the Elephant's Child for insatiable curiosity as to Facts."

"Richard said suddenly, leaning forward, "You really don't approve, Lynn. You can't get a chance to say, 'Bless you, my children!' Or isn't that done any more?"

"You eloped, didn't you?" inquired her offspring with a malicious grin.

"Anybody, said it to you?"

"Not just at the moment," Linnet admitted with a wry sigh. She lifted a languid glance under fringed lashes that forty-odd years had neither withered nor staled. "Richard Welles was once engaged to my dearest friend, Hattie Ordway. She wasn't so stout then. It will seem delightfully quaint to have him engaged to my daughter."

"He is forty-eight," said Lynn grimly, "if that's what you're getting at! And I am twenty-two. We disastrously lack the same physical condition. I think it's the ideal condition. I like a man who's seen something of the world—who knows what he's about."

"Her mother breathed sweetly, "Richard should."

Lynn expounded, unmoved by maternal flippances: "He's got poise and charm—and finesse. He's not like these boys I've grown up with. He's a master of men."

"I'm always rather a nice hand with the women, too," Linnet suggested amiably.

Lynn replied a trifle coldly, "I know you don't like him, mother."

"She's better," said Lynn returning to her good nature. "Well—aren't you?"

"I said you'd probably oppose him."

"He did."

"I told him I was sure that when you saw how much this meant to me you would do nothing of the sort."

"Meaning that it would do no good if I did."

"Exactly!" A smile of friendly understanding passed between mother and daughter.

"I did," said almost emotionally: "Are you really in love with Richard Welles, Lynn?"

"You know I'm not a very mushy person."

"No. Still—marriage, my child, is to a certain extent a matter of—ah—muscle." A look to be with her.

"He's satisfied," said Lynn briefly. She sank herself in the morning paper, adding in a busineslike manner: "Be over this afternoon to see you."

"Don't let him!" cried Linnet sharply. "I should laugh in his face. A baby like you—and a gray-headed goose like Richard! He's lost his silly head over your complexion—which, thanks to me, is extremely good—and your youth, which has no earthly right to."

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SHE got up, her eyes full of sudden unwilling tears.

"Sit down, mother," said Lynn with enormous patience. "I'll tell you exactly how I feel about it, and then you'll be able to sympathize, perhaps."

"Lynn—when did I ever refuse

"I don't know what you call it—calling the man I intend to marry a gray-headed goose."

"Gray-headed gander might be better," said Linnet with an apricot chick.

Her child disregarded her magnificently.

"This is why I want to marry him. I've thought it all out, which you will admit most people don't."

"Can't," said Linnet. "At the moment."

"All right. I admire Richard more than any man I have ever known. He's a success—financially, politically, socially. And you like him. His wife will have a lovely home, everything in the world she wants, and the devotion of a big man in addition."

"Ah, then Richard is—mushy?"

Lynn's fresh, young face hardened.

"Suppose we let the subject drop," she suggested. "I wanted you to know about Richard. So you could be decent to him this afternoon."

"I have always been decent to Richard."

"He's coming about 4, remember?"

And Lynn went about her business.

He came about 4. Linnet awaited him from a soign of vantage behind the tea table.

"Do come in, Richard," she greeted him sweetly, "and be congratulated, or proposed to, for it is I'm supposed to do for you."

Richard Welles was a tall, gray-haired man, with a manner uniquely charming. Linnet had known him since she was a girl.

"Does one run to meet you, crying, 'My, my, my!'" She dimpled.

"One emphatically does not. Stay just where you are!" He came to her and took her hand and pressed it warmly.

"The bride's mother," said Linnet beside a black pompadour, with bangles, and carried a cluster of immetelles. Tea, Richard!"

"Nothing at all, thank you. I'm not hungry." He seated himself across the way from her and regarded her pleasantly.

"I'm, of course, you wouldn't be," signed Linnet. "Do you mind if I am? Ah, Richard, what it is to be young—" she hesitated the most second—"again!"

"Please—quite so," said Welles warmly. "Lynn told you?"

"All," said Lynn's mother, a trifle theatrically.

"Him! You approve?"

"You knew I did."

"But you consent?"

"Admittedly. My child is quite capable of marriage before a notary public, if I didn't. Yes, Richard, I consent. Fully, if not freely. You shall walk down the aisle in all the glory of cutaway and lavender trousers. Lynn besides you smoothed her white, long, orange gown while I sat sobbing in a front pew and people whisper, 'He was best man at her father's wedding, wasn't he? No. He should have been, but they eloped.' Thereby dragging all that pathetic old bandage and the light once more. Richard!"

"Really, Linnet—you are incorrigible!"

"That's what Lynn said this morning. You are going to be immensely congenial, I can see."

"She's too wonderful! I can believe in good fortune. After all these years—a flower of a girl like that!"

"Mush!" said Linnet, calmly, helping herself to thin, small sandwich. "You know you don't talk like that to me!"

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WELLES swallowed a half-sigh. "I know. She hates sentimentality. She's like a clean, shining sword-blade."

"She's like a clean, shining sword-blade," reported Linnet.

"Just that exquisite, young— I love in her."

"And she—ah—loves you," said Linnet politely—"for your sophistication—experience, and what not. I foresee complications."

"You think—she does love me, Linnet?"

Linnet regarded him coolly. "She's only twenty-two—to your forty-eight, my dear boy! She hasn't even been to a co-educational school. She's thoroughly ignorant as to the theories of life and hopelessly ignorant as to its realities."

"I'll stand between her and the ugliest of them."

"I am her mother," said Linnet, "and I have been able to stand between her and anything at all. She is the Elephant's Child for insatiable curiosity as to Facts."

"Richard said suddenly, leaning forward, "You really don't approve, Lynn. You can't get everything I've got to make her happy."

"It's what you haven't got shell-pink hair, and I am Linnet."

"Monty dropped in at tea-time next day. He displayed a frank affection for chocolate cake."

"D'y'know," he confided engagingly. "Though we all were sisters, last night I didn't get the relationship at all, at first."

"Which relationship?" inquired Linnet most unfairly.

He blinked at her out of long, narrow brown-wavy eyes which had been closed since she had moved. "I will admit," he conceded, "the old man's announcement was something of a shock."

"Richard had done a good deal for him, hasn't he? I gathered as much."

"It's not what you do; it's how you do it," said Lynn succinctly.

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